



The Florida House of Representatives

Chris Sprowls
Speaker

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

February 26, 2021

Contact

media@myfloridahouse.gov

(850) 717-5780

Speaker Chris Sprowls Announces Robust Agenda to Mitigate Effects of Flooding, Sea Level Rise in Florida

Always Ready: Flooding & Sea Level Rise legislation introduced along the waterfront in St. Petersburg today

St. Petersburg, Fla. - Florida House Speaker Chris Sprowls, R-Palm Harbor, today rolled out sweeping legislation that will dedicate \$100 million each year starting in 2022-2023 to address the realities of sea level rise and flooding. Speaker Sprowls, who announced on the water's edge on the University of South Florida's St. Petersburg campus, was joined by colleagues from the Florida House of Representatives and Florida Senate, Pinellas County Property Appraiser Mike Twitty, as well as a representative from the American Flood Coalition and USF President Steven C. Currall.

"Today, we are announcing the most robust agenda to mitigate flooding and sea level rise that the State of Florida has ever seen," said Speaker Sprowls. "As a low-lying state surrounded by water on three sides, Florida is particularly vulnerable to the risk of flooding. With sea level rise, we are seeing that risk grow exponentially - from storm surge and tidal flooding to groundwater and flash flooding - the impacts are devastating. In order to protect Floridians in their homes, their backyards, and their communities, we are introducing a suite of bills to address flooding - one of the most pressing issues of our time."

The cornerstone of the Speaker's flooding and sea level rise mitigation agenda is a proposed committee bill to be commonly known as the "Always Ready: Flooding & Sea Level Rise Act."

"I am reminded of the Latin phrase *semper paratus*, which means 'always ready,'" Speaker Sprowls foreshadowed during his November 17, 2020, Organization Session speech to the Florida House. "It's the motto of the United States Coast Guard, and it should be our guiding emergency management principle."

The proposed committee bill outlines several steps to address flooding and sea level rise across the state. Among other things, the legislation:

- Establishes Florida's first-ever three-year Statewide Flooding and Sea Level Rise Resilience Plan to be updated annually by the Department of Environmental Protection.
- Calls for a statewide flood risk assessment by the Department of Environmental Protection to inform the Resilience Plan.
- Creates the Resilient Florida Grant Program to provide funds to local governments that would cover the costs of planning for and addressing threats from flooding and sea level rise.
- Encourages the formation of regional resilience coalitions to plan for the resilience needs of communities and coordinate intergovernmental solutions.
- Establishes the Florida Flood Hub for Applied Research and Innovation to collaborate with academic and research institutions to address the state's flooding and sea level rise challenges.

"This transformational public policy that prepares Florida to deal with the implications of sea level rise and flooding will be an example for the rest of the nation," said Representative Ralph Massullo, R-Lecanto, chair of the House State Affairs Committee. "This legislation protects our homeowners from flooding events that upend lives, as well as our state's businessowners – the backbone of our economy. We know that 40% of small businesses that close after a natural disaster never reopen; this legislation is intended to ensure that a flood event does not become a long-term disaster that forces businesses to shut their doors permanently."

"With this legislation, we will protect home values and allow our businesses to operate uninterrupted by making smart investments in flood protection," said Representative James Buchanan, R-Osprey, Chair of the Environment, Agriculture & Flooding Subcommittee. "We are looking forward to hearing more discussion on this issue and consideration of these bills in the Environment, Agriculture & Flooding Subcommittee."

"I am honored to sponsor this foundational piece of legislation that strengthens Florida against disasters caused by sea level rise and flooding," said Representative Demi Busatta Cabrera, R-Coral Gables, sponsor of the House proposed committee bill. "From creating a statewide assessment that identifies what is at risk and tells us where we need to focus our resources, to calling for \$100 million each year, beginning in 2022, to fund projects submitted by local governments, so they can continue to blaze the way on mitigation efforts. The Always Ready agenda is a strong legislative package that will undoubtedly make Florida a leader in flood mitigation."

"Nine of the top 10 counties in terms of total estimated annual economic damage across the entire U.S. are in the State of Florida. Lee County, where my home district is located, is included in that top ten, so this issue is personal to me and my neighbors," said Senator Ray Rodrigues (R-Fort Myers), sponsor of the Senate bill.

Also introduced today, a House Joint Resolution (HJR 1377) and Implementing Bill (HB 1379), would offer property tax breaks to any homeowner when the property is elevated to increase its resistance to flooding and sea level rise. Under the legislation, the added value to the property from the elevation would not be considered for property tax assessment purposes.

"Homeowners who are taking proactive measures to protect their property from flooding should not only be rewarded, but these actions should be incentivized," said Representative Linda Chaney, R-St. Pete Beach, sponsor of HJR 1377 and HB 1379. "I am honored to have the opportunity to sponsor HJR 1377 and HB 1379, which encourage homeowners to take the steps necessary to protect their homes and their families from the disastrous impacts of flooding by offering tax breaks to those who voluntarily elevate their property. I also commend Speaker Sprowls, who made this issue a priority from Day One, and my colleagues for focusing their efforts on this issue that has impacted so many of our fellow Floridians. I would also like to thank Mike Twitty for bringing this idea forward."

“For years, the danger of devastating flood damage to homes and businesses has flown under the radar of the Legislature. This legislation puts real money and action toward addressing the problem,” said Senator Jeff Brandes, R-St. Petersburg, sponsor of SJR 1182 and SB 1186. “This is something that members of both chambers and both parties can agree on: It is irresponsible for us to sit and do nothing. ”

“Flooding is worsening across the country, and no one knows these challenges better than Florida,” said Melissa Roberts, executive director of the American Flood Coalition. “Our states are our living laboratories for policy and innovation, and big, bold policies like those introduced by Speaker Sprowls today exemplify the leadership our nation needs. This landmark legislation is a tremendous step forward for Florida.”

“To meet the challenges of flooding and sea level rise, we must ensure that our communities are better prepared for the future. This legislation will protect Floridians, their homes, and the businesses that drive our growing economy. Together, we can build a stronger and more resilient Florida,” concluded Speaker Sprowls.

Bills can be viewed here:

- [Representative Busatta Cabrera’s “Always Ready” PCB](#)
- [Representative Busatta Cabrera’s Resilient Trust Fund PCB](#)
- [Representative Chaney’s HJR 1377](#)
- [Representative Chaney’s HB 1379](#)

#